

**Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site**  
**Olmsted Archives**  
**Landscape Design Records**  
**Job Specific Records**

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*Sub-series:* Job #946 Boston Common Records

*Accession number:* FRLA-1

*Catalog number:* FRLA-47412

*Collection number:* 2001.001/04.00946

*Quantity:* 513 items; 0.5 linear foot

*Storage:* 1 document box

*Date Range:* 1907-1926; bulk 1910-1912

*Description:*

The bulk of this collection is material related to the Boston Common soil improvement project that was undertaken by the Olmsted Brothers in 1910.<sup>1</sup> However, a significant amount of material dating from 1911 indicates that Job #946 also included work on paving, drainage, curbing (around Frog Pond), and regrading. The following types of documents are included in these files: cost estimate sheets, lists of construction bids from contractors, progress reports, soil collection reports, contracts, and specifications. Hans J. Koehler appears to have been the primary landscape architect working on the project; his name or initials are on many of the documents.

The "Soil Collection" files contain daily reports of the men who were employed by Olmsted Brothers to collect samples of soil that might be suitable for use on Boston Common. Allan Long, John Heavey, and Adam Noble documented the number of hours they worked, the routes they traversed, their mode of transportation, and the number of samples they submitted. The files also contain letters from prospective sellers of the "heavy clayey topsoil" that was requested by Olmsted Brothers in a newspaper advertisement.<sup>2</sup> Maps of the regions traveled by each soil collector are included in the plans and drawings collection for Job #946.<sup>3</sup> Chalmers W. DePue analyzed the soil samples and recorded his findings in a series of notebooks.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See the following article for a thorough explanation of the project: Olmsted, Frederick L. 1911. Soil Improvement and Irrigation on Boston Common. *Landscape Architecture* 1, no. 4: 186-96. Also see the report by Hans J. Koehler entitled "The Improvement of the Conditions for Vegetation on Boston Common," July 16, 1914. *NAB-NAC Reference Collection*, "NAB 2150 Trees – Planting and Culture – Arboriculture [1 of 2]." Archives of the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, Massachusetts (Olmsted NHS).

<sup>2</sup> A clipping of the advertisement is in "Soil Collection, 1910-1911, [2 of 2]," Box 1, Folder 8.

<sup>3</sup> See *Plans and Drawings*, "Job # 946, Boston Common," plans 946-67-sh3, 946-68-sh1, and 946-69-sh5. Olmsted NHS.

<sup>4</sup> *Job #946 Boston Common, Soil Surveys, 1910-1911* [unprocessed as of November 2002]. Olmsted NHS.

There are several interesting items in the "Paving and Drainage" file. The work progress reports give an overview of the entire project and present recommendations for further work. The "Instructions for Making Record Plans of Drainage, Paving and Other Surface Changes" may add to an understanding of the landscape drawings associated with this job. A clipping of a newspaper article from the *Boston Herald*, entitled "Fight Subway under Common," discusses the content of a Boston Common Society meeting. The article also states that a talk was given at the meeting by William L. Phillips, an Olmsted Brothers' employee.

Several of the folders have titles that reflect contents unrelated to Boston Common. Three of these files contain booklets that were likely used as reference material for the soil improvement project: *The Soils of Kentucky*, *Soil Survey of Montgomery County*, and *Proposals for Bids and Estimates* by the City of New York. The folder labeled "Boston Public Garden" contains a plant list and a page of accounting notes for the public garden, but it also contains a handwritten draft of the contract for the walks and surface drains project on Boston Common.

One folder, which was perhaps inadvertently filed with this collection, contains documents related to Job #951, Boston Public Grounds Department, Street Tree Planting. The file contains "Reports on Tree Pit Work" for Blue Hill Avenue, Avenue Louis Pasteur, and Dorchester and Bennington Streets and bills for "extra work" on the project. Coleman Brothers, the contracting company that was also hired for the Boston Common paving and drain work, generated these records.

#### *Collection Listing:*

##### Box 1

##### Folder:

1. *The Soils of Kentucky*, 1915
2. *Soil Survey of Montgomery County, Alabama*, 1926
3. *Proposals for Bids or Estimates*, City of New York, Dept. of Parks, 1907
4. Boston City Streets, [Job #951], 1911-1912
5. [Paving and Drainage], 1911-1912
6. Boston Public Garden, [Job #948], 1911-1912
7. [Soil Work and Regrading, Contracts and Specifications], 1910-1911
8. [Soil Collection], 1910-1911 [1 of 2]
9. [Soil Collection], 1910-1911 [2 of 2]